



Department of Veterans Affairs National Diversity Internship Program (NDIP)

What all Students Need To Know



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The NDIP Mission

The mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs NDIP is to promote entry into Veteran service based on the careers of women, persons with disabilities, and members of diverse groups, where those groups are under-represented in the industry. The NDIP provides college students experience working with the Veterans Affairs while engaged in Veteran focused mission related work projects, special assignments, or research.

About the Program

The National Diversity Internship Program (NDIP) provides a temporary career exploration opportunity for current undergraduate and graduate students from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Office of Human Resources and Administration, has established a Department-wide centralized fund to support increased participation in the NDIP. The funding is available to each Administration and all Staff Offices in VA Central Office (VACO). The NDIP recruits interns through organizations that conduct targeted outreach to diverse student populations. Applicants apply first to these recruiting organizations and are then placed in participating VA offices.

The NDIP is administered by the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI). The internship program provides current and graduating college students an opportunity to augment their academic studies while learning about VA career opportunities while contributing to our mission. The internship also affords VA intern sponsors an opportunity to meet promising individuals who can ultimately be included in our future applicant pipeline. A sponsor is a VA official who will interface with the intern daily and provide direction and guidance on project tasks and assignments. Accordingly, this initiative is essential for tapping into the rich, diverse, multigenerational talent that will aid our efforts to transform VA into a 21st Century organization that provides the best service to our Veterans.

INTERNSHIPS

So what exactly is an internship??

An internship is a great way for you to explore new career opportunities. Typically, an internship is a short term work experience related to your major or career goals. In short, an internship provides you an opportunity to:

- **“test” the waters in a career field of interest**
- **apply skills and knowledge learned in the classroom to actual on-the-job-experience**
- **gain practical experience in a chosen career field**
- **Identify strengths and weaknesses**
- **Develop important career contacts in the business world**
- **Acquire work experience to list on resumes and employment applications**



Everyone you meet during the course of your Internship is now a contact. These people can help guide your career path as you make your way into the professional world. These people know other people in the career field as well and can provide introductions. The fellow Interns you meet may also become great contacts in the future.

Interning in a field of choice will stand out on your resume and help you with your job search. Participating Interns gain on-the-job training that integrates education, career development, and public service, while offices hosting Interns benefit from the contributions of creative and innovative students.

Why Provide Internships?

Internships allow students the opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills in a professional setting while still in school.

Benefits to Department/Office

- ♦ *Immediate assistance to support projects*
- ♦ *Students will provide new ideas and viewpoints*
- ♦ *Salary savings = No cost to department/office*
- ♦ *Effective public relations ambassadors for VA; Recruitment and workforce planning*



Benefits to Students

- ⇒ *Career related experience*
- ⇒ *Gains practical knowledge*
- ⇒ *Opportunity to explore career avenues*
- ⇒ *Valuable work experience for their resumes*
- ⇒ *Increased self-confidence*
- ⇒ *Enhances conventional classroom learning methods*

BEFORE YOU START

Before you start the internship process, take some time to examine yourself and your goals. You can start your exploration by asking yourself the following questions:

What is my ideal internship according to the following criteria?

- Career field/setting: _____
- Geographic location: _____
- Timing -- summer, fall, spring: _____
- Hours -- part-time or full-time: _____
- For-credit or not-for-credit: _____

Why do I want to do an internship?

What previous jobs or volunteer experience have I had? Which ones did I like and dislike?

What do I have to offer an employer and what skills would I like to develop and improve?

What are my career goals and how will an internship fit into my future plans?

What contacts do I have in the career field?

I'm Hired

What Do I Do Now?

Congratulations on securing your internship! It marks a new beginning for you as a new professional in your career field of interest. Before you accept the internship, remember to:

- **Request a detailed job description**
- **Meet your Internship supervisor**
- **Check the office's reputation if you can**

Accepting and Declining Internships

Once your internship is officially approved by the appropriate persons, the following steps should be executed in order to finalize your internship:

- **Official Acceptance:** A verbal acceptance is not legally binding. To officially accept the Internship offer, write a letter or email to the hiring person who officially offered you the position.
- **Schedule:** Be clear about what your schedule will be, what the starting date is, and who will be your supervisor
- **Transportation:** Make sure you have a mode of transportation to and from your work location and if available, procure any parking permits or passes.

Declining an Internship Offer

If you decide not to accept an internship that has been extended to you, you must officially decline the offer either by telephone or in a brief note. In preparation of declining an offer, please be mindful of the effort and time that the organization has put into interviewing you. You **DON'T** want to “burn any bridges” and jeopardize your potential for future internships or jobs.

**Tips for your first day!*

On or before your first day, find out these important facts:

- **CHAIN OF COMMAND:** Find out who your immediate supervisor is and the names of employees with whom you will work with regularly.
- **NORMS:** Pay attention to others in the office to learn the norm for behavior and work style.
- **TOUR:** Get a tour of your office/facilities and learn the locations of the resources you will be using.
- **ASK:** If you are unsure or don't know the answer, ask your supervisor or a coworker.
- **BRING A NOTEBOOK:** To take notes about what you are learning.



NDIP Mentoring Initiative

I. Program Purpose

- A. Ensure VA third-party acquired interns have a meaningful, positive, and supportive internship experience
- B. Increase intern's interest in Department of Veterans Affairs employment opportunities

II. Program Measurement

- A. Evaluate the mentoring experience between mentors and NDIP and IIP interns, to ensure that program objectives were met
- B. Mentees who are interested in mentoring are matched with a mentor

III. Program Objectives

- A. Provide interns with a mentor who will "check-in" with the interns midway through their internship to ensure they are successfully learning, working, and thriving in VA's organizational culture.
- B. Provide interns with a mentor who can provide career guidance, particularly as it relates to how the intern's educational background and career interests translates into a career with VA.

IV. Program Structure

- A. Mentors will be asked to dedicate a minimum of 4 hours to their intern mentees during the remaining 4-5 weeks of the summer internship period.
- B. Shadowing assignments are encouraged as a part of the mentorship program.

V. NDIP Mentor – Mentee Agreement

VACO MENTORSHIP AGREEMENT – PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE FUTURE

This VACO mentorship agreement will remain in effect during the internship and may be terminated at any time, by either the mentee or mentor. We agree to the following:

1. Retain confidentiality of information between parties
2. Provide at least 4 hours of interaction with the mentee via face to face or phone sessions
3. Participate in the evaluation of the mentoring program

Mentoring Partnership Objectives

As a result of working with a mentor, the mentee should accomplish the following:

Primary

Professional/Career Development: Learn how their educational background and career interests translates into a career with VA's workforce.

- ◇ **Organizational Awareness:** Learn about VA's organizational culture, to include ICARE values, and how to successfully navigate within its environment

Secondary

- ◇ **Leadership awareness:** Learn when to implement and step into situations where they can lead and influence positive outcomes
- ◇ **Resolution management:** Learn how to resolve interpersonal, organizational, or other conflicts

Role of the Mentor

I will support my mentee's developmental process by ensuring the above objectives are met, which will involve sharing organizational insight, expanding his/her network, acting as a sounding board, and providing developmental feedback.

Meeting Logistics

Our meetings will take place at these days/times: _____

Our meetings will be conducted at the following location: _____

Signatures:

Mentee _____ Date _____

Mentor _____ Date _____

Supervisor _____ Date _____

Recommendations for Mentor-Mentee Meetings

While the Mentor is available to counsel and impart lessons learned, it is the mentee who should take the lead in the mentoring sessions. This may include, but is not limited to the mentee proposing the agendas, facilitating the meeting, and summarizing agreements. Recommended below is a list of some quick conversation starters and activities that may be used to prepare and facilitate the mentorship sessions:

- A. Negotiate your ground rules for working together, when and how you will meet i.e., confidentiality, etc. (see Mentor-mentee agreement).**
- B. Schedule official times on your and your mentors calendars.**
- C. Discuss mentee's growth areas and tentative plans for working on identified areas.**
- D. Discuss how feedback will be given and received, and what, if anything, either would like to avoid doing.**
- E. Identify/refine 1-3 objectives to work on together -- preferably skills pertaining to growth areas and leveraging strengths.**
- F. Conduct informal networking by introducing mentee to at least two people who could prove helpful to their careers.**
- G. Discuss any cultural values that individuals possess and whether culture impacts the work environment?**
- H. Mentee can research, draft, or present on various career paths they would consider taking within the organization. Mentor can provide feedback.**
- I. Discuss a role model that has been influential in each of your lives. How has he/she impacted your decisions or beliefs?**
- J. Mentee may shadow mentor or observe him/her while he/she works and de-brief afterwards.**
- K. Prepare for the end of your formal mentoring relationship: discuss lessons learned, career goals and career plans.**

Mentorship Program Evaluation Criteria

4 - Absolutely Agree; 3 - Somewhat Agree; 2 - Somewhat Don't Agree; 1 - Absolutely Don't Agree

- 1. ____ Was your Mentor easy to approach and talk with?**
- 2. ____ Did your Mentor offer advice and encouragement to you with respect to your independent goals?**
- 3. ____ Did you receive regular feedback and constructive criticism?**
- 4. ____ Did your Mentor facilitate participation in professional activities?**
- 5. ____ Did your Mentor involve you in networking?**
- 6. ____ Did your Mentor invite you to informal gatherings of people from work?**
- 7. ____ Did your Mentor provide you with any needed support within the division or department where you worked?**
- 8. ____ Did your Mentor connect you to other senior professionals who could "fill in the gaps" in areas where you might be less skilled?**
- 9. ____ Did you establish a written plan including goals to be met under the direction or guidance of your Mentor?**
- 10. ____ Were the guidelines established at the beginning defining how often or when you would meet on a routine basis?**
- 11. ____ Did the two of you determine at the beginning of the relationship, guidelines by which to evaluate the success of the relationship?**

On a separate sheet of paper, please provide any general comments and/or suggestions to improve the NDIP Mentoring Program.



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON

May 31, 2013

TO ALL EMPLOYEES

SUBJECT: The Secretary's Equal Employment Opportunity, Diversity and Inclusion, and No FEAR Policy Statement

As Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), I am proud to convey my clear commitment to equal employment opportunity, diversity and inclusion, and constructive conflict resolution in VA's workplace. Our ability to provide the best services to our Nation's Veterans is directly linked to having a fair and inclusive organizational culture that leverages the diverse talent of all of our human resources.

Essential to creating such a culture is the demonstration of VA's Core Values: Integrity, **C**ommitment, **A**dvocacy, **R**espect, and **E**xcellence (I CARE). Each of us bears the responsibility to ensure that discrimination is not tolerated and that diversity is promoted so that every individual can contribute his or her fullest potential to VA's mission.

Supervisors and managers bear a special responsibility for promoting the complementary principles of equity and diversity and inclusion in the workplace. The attached Policy Statement provides a summary of VA's workplace policies and employee protections. Your active engagement is critical to cultivating a diverse workforce and inclusive workplace in VA.



Eric K. Shinseki

Attachment